

## University Web Services

University Web Services (UWS) is a small department comprised of three web specialists, one web coordinator, and one manager. We concentrate our efforts on the high-traffic websites, such as the UTD main (gateway) website, the websites of our seven schools, and web applications such as the course lookup and a campus events calendar. Much of our effort is spent on web redesign. We use a five-phase methodology to accomplish redesigns:

1. **Discovery/Planning** is the process of asking lots of questions of and listening to end users and departmental decision makers to determine needs for the new website. We survey the client, collect existing communication materials, seek to understand the audience and identify any programming needs. We clarify overall goals with a document called the communication brief. Once clarified, we go through a planning process to assign a project team, set up staging areas, develop a project plan and work schedules. We also determine how each of the deliverables for the following phases will be accepted by the client department.
2. **Site Structuring** is the preparation of a blueprint for the new site. The result of this process is a site map – a document that outlines the name of each page that will be built for the new site and illustrates the navigation path the end user will take to click there from the home page. It is in this phase that we develop a content delivery plan for the department to produce content and deliver it to the technical personnel for production. We also set naming conventions, address navigation, address naming and labeling, define key user paths and create a sitemap that shows proposed links and main navigation.
3. **Visual Design** is the process of creating a set of prototypes for the new site that incorporates the navigation scheme, “look and feel” elements, and page layout elements. Typically, multiple prototypes are presented to the client department. They choose one which then may be revised a time or two until we gain their final approval. Once approved, a set of templates is built that facilitates the efficient production of web pages in the next phase.
4. **Production** is the process of building out the website according to the plans that resulted from the discovery/planning and site structuring phases. At this point, finished web pages are produced from content provided by the department. Photography is enhanced, cropped and optimized for use on the website. A plan for quality assurance is developed. Typically, the team plans to have testing done by both the project team and people who have not used the website. Any bugs, spelling, grammar or factual errors are caught and corrected before launch.
5. **Launch & Beyond** is concerned with making the website available to the public and addressing maintenance concerns. This phase includes the

development of a style guide that specifies colors, fonts, headings, editable and uneditable elements; the purpose of the style guide is to maintain the integrity of the visual design throughout all web pages. This phase is also concerned with addressing how the site will be maintained in the future. University Web Services provides training for the employee selected to handle future updates to the website.

University Web Services also handles maintenance for the main website. On a daily basis, UWS posts news releases, spotlights and events on the UTD home page. This team also creates pages on demand for priority information items, such as a campus-wide power outage or the university's procedures for student victims of Hurricane Katrina. Every semester, this team goes through the main pages, correcting broken links, updating content and photography.

Our department also creates custom, quick turnaround websites for information items determined to be a priority by the administration. A recent example is the creation of a website for the university's Strategic Plan. In this case, a website was set up to handle the dissemination of the plan and the collection of feedback from it. University Web Services posted multiple revisions of the site to cover the 27 revisions of the plan. A form was set up to collect replies from anyone who wished to comment; those replies were funneled through the chair of the strategic plan committee and shared with the President.

One area that University Web Services has invested much effort is in the support of departments who want to publish their own information on the Web but do not have the specialty technical skills in their staff to be able to do a good job. Over our 30 months of existence, we have trained many departmental employees how to update their own websites without training them in the technical skills of web development. A good example of this would be the training we did for the International Student Services Office when we redesigned their website. In that case, the department wanted to post updates that may affect international UTD students on their website, such as updates to the laws governing student visas. We trained an employee in their office to do the updates using special software that works with our templates. That department has been able to create news items with little assistance from our department. Should the department run into trouble, or require another employee to be trained, we will step in to provide help. We have replicated this model successfully many times with several departments across campus.

One request we heard repeatedly from students and faculty on the Web Advisory Board was to consolidate systems that require a username and password. Over the past year, University Web Services has provided the equivalent of one full-time person to the planning and construction of an intranet for the campus. The intranet, named Galaxy, will allow students, faculty and staff to access the most popular services with one sign-in. The popular services that may be accessed will include:

1. personal/official records, such as grades, bills, class schedules, class rosters, pay stubs, mailing addresses, etc.
2. WebCT, for course-specific documents, such as syllabi, class notes, online discussion, and instant messaging with classmates.
3. webmail, a web-based client for university e-mail
4. role-based content, such as news from the Faculty Senate for faculty, news from the Student Government for students and news from the Staff Council for employees.

This intranet is currently in development and scheduled to launch in August, 2006.

University Web Services continues to concentrate its limited resources on the web development efforts that matter the most to the constituents of the university. We do this by usability testing – watching end users of the website try to acquire information or complete tasks without guidance, recording the results and turning that information into an action plan for improvement. We also use WebTrends, software that provides web traffic/usage numbers, to determine what pages are being viewed the most. We also determine where to concentrate efforts by doing lots of listening. We listen to the students, faculty, staff and departmental decision makers to find out what they need from the many websites that make up the UTD web presence and then work toward making those things a reality.